

Village budget includes no raises for employees

Written by Carol Pomeday
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Street lights may be dimmed as officials look for ways to reduce costs

Village of Belgium employees won't get pay raises and have been told to limit overtime to avoid a tax increase for residents.

The proposed \$954,930 budget, which was approved Monday by the Village Board, calls for a reduction of \$60,000 in expenses to reduce taxes by \$3,665 to \$692,358.

That was needed to keep the village tax rate at \$4.28 per \$1,000 assessed valuation, the same as last year, Trustee Ron Weyker, chairman of the General Government and Finance Committee, said.

The total tax rate of \$16.32 per \$1,000 valuation is \$1.57 higher than last year, but it is expected to be reduced by a state school credit, which is unknown at this time. Last year, the credit was \$1.16 per \$1,000 valuation.

Taxpayers will see increases from all other taxing entities. The Cedar Grove-Belgium School District tax rate is \$8.52, the county rate is \$1.89, Lakeshore Technical College will add \$1.47 and the state rate is 17 cents.

The village's no-tax-increase goal presented plenty of challenges, Weyker said.

"Our revenues, other than taxes, were down \$80,000 this year, which is 20%," he said.

To compensate, the board will assess the water and sewer utilities \$33,000 in taxes.

"In the past, we have forgiven that tax," Weyker said. "This year, we forgave half of it."

The village's payroll is about the same as last year, Weyker said, but there will be one less office person. Jamie Cecil, who will be the treasurer and deputy clerk starting Jan. 1, will receive a pay increase from \$7,028 to \$18,428.

Current Clerk-Treasurer Lila Mueller, who will be the clerk and deputy treasurer, will be paid \$23,400 for that job.

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Both employees are also paid by the sewer and water utilities, as are all employees.

Public Works Department expenditures are slated to decrease \$18,000 to \$300,100, with less money budgeted for maintenance, vehicle expenses and snowplowing.

Accurate Appraisals of Menasha was hired for \$4,500, a third of what was paid to Peters Assessment Service last year for a reappraisal.

Legal fees are slated to decrease from \$17,200 to \$10,640 and accounting costs from \$22,500 to \$16,875.

Energy costs for lights are also expected to decrease. Christmas decorations will get 130 new LED bulbs that are expected to save \$600 in electric bills during the 34-day season.

In addition, the village will remove lamps from 32 older street lights. Each light costs \$17.50 per month to operate, Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said. All intersections will be lit, but some mid-block lights on side streets will be removed, he said.

“Random Lake removed 50 lights and they said they only got a few complaints,” Birenbaum said.

Village President Kevin Kowalkowski noted no capital items are budgeted.

“We have a capital fund and will stay within the funds available,” he said. “We will have to prioritize where our money will be spent.”

Kowalkowski praised Birenbaum, Mueller and Cecil for helping find reductions rather than hindering efforts.

“It’s a very aggressive budget and will need to be managed on a month-to-month basis to be sure we are on budget,” Weyker said.

The village has kept to a zero tax increase for the last couple years, Kowalkowski noted, but that may have to change.

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“If development doesn’t pick up, we’ll have to look at increasing taxes next year,” he said.

Weyker agreed.

“Had this been a normal year, I think we would have considered it this year,” he said. “But with the economy the way it is and people worried about being able to stay in their homes, we couldn’t do that.”

A budget hearing is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 7. The budget is on the Web site www.village.belgium.wi.us.